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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8326
RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2085
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1601
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 5030
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5085
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8683
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6252
RUEHVI/AMEMBASSY VIENNA 0124
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1623
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1897
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 0471
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHDC
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHPPH/CDC ATLANTA GA
RUCLRFA/USDA WASHDC
RUEHRC/USDA FAS WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, G/AIAG
PACOM FOR FPA
USDA FOR FAS/PECAD, FAS/CNMP, FAS/AAD, APHIS;
BANGKOK FOR USAID: JMACARTHUR, APHIS:NCARDENAS, REO:HHOWARD

E.O. 12958:N/A
TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [AMED](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CASC](#) [TBIO](#) [KFLU](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: BURMA: INAUGURATION OF NEW AVIAN INFLUENZA LAB

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Summary

¶1. (SBU) The Minister of Livestock and Fisheries on October 25 presided over the inauguration of the GOB's new Biosecurity Level 2 (BSL-2) Enhanced Animal Health Laboratory in Rangoon. The new lab, constructed by the Ministry's Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department with funds from the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), Japan, Australia, and the United States, is the first of its kind in Burma and will enable LBVD officials to detect and confirm highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 virus more effectively and quickly. The new facility will protect the laboratory workers and environment from contamination when dealing with hazardous pathogens. End Summary.

BSL-2 Enhanced Lab

¶2. (SBU) After almost two years, the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries' Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department (LBVD) has completed the construction of a new BSL-2 Enhanced Animal Laboratory in Rangoon. In his remarks at the October 25 inauguration ceremony, Minister of Livestock Brigadier General Maung Maung Thein stated that the lab, the first of its kind in Burma, will improve the ability of LBVD veterinarians and technicians to detect and confirm highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) virus. He noted that the Burmese Government would have been unable to build and equip the new lab -- the country's main animal health diagnostic lab -- without the financial assistance and technical support from the FAO, OIE, and the governments of Japan, Australia, and the United States. (Note: Since 2006, the USG has obligated a total of USD two million through the WHO and FAO to assist in improving the GOB's capacity to

detect and prevent avian influenza outbreaks. USAID is currently working with WHO and FAO to obligate an additional USD 1.2 million in FY08 funds. End Note.)

¶3. (SBU) During his inaugural remarks, LBVD Director General U Maung Maung Nyunt stated that the new BSL-2 lab meets international standards for work involving moderate potential safety hazards for personnel and the environment. All LBVD lab technicians have received training in handling pathogenic agents and will take extreme precautions when working with contaminated items, he noted. Using USAID funds, LBVD installed a negative pressure chamber room where technicians will be able to isolate and identify the HPAI virus without fear of contamination. The new lab, which is equipped with advanced technologic equipment such as a gene sequencer, biological safety cabinets, and personal protective equipment, will help to improve the ability of LBVD to detect and confirm HPAI virus, he explained. LBVD technicians will share their findings with the international community and the OIE, he pledged.

Looking Toward the Future

¶4. (SBU) U Maung Maung Nyunt explained that although there has not been an AI outbreak in Burma in almost one year (the last recorded case in animals was in November 2007), LBVD officials remain vigilant, working to improve detection and surveillance capabilities. The Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, working through LBVD, plans to establish a BSL-2 Enhanced Animal Laboratory in Mandalay to serve as the main diagnostic lab for Upper Burma. Currently, all avian influenza samples must be sent to the National Lab in Rangoon for testing. An additional BSL-2 lab would enable LBVD to detect any AI cases in Northern Burma more quickly. U Maung Maung Nyunt emphasized the need not only to strengthen regional labs

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throughout the country with new, improved equipment, but also to improve the capacity of technicians to detect the disease.

¶5. (SBU) Improving LBVD's epidemiological skills is just one step, U Maung Maung Nyunt stated. The GOB must continue to educate the Burmese people about the dangers of HPAI and other animal diseases. He noted that LBVD recently signed an MOU with the FAO and several NGO partners to expand awareness campaigns throughout the country. LBVD will continue to urge people to change their behaviors and report any suspected outbreaks.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) Burma has come far on AI in the past two years, openly discussing, sharing information, and cooperating with us and its neighbors. The country, by all accounts, has been H5N1 free for almost one year, and LBVD continues its surveillance of H5N1 in high risk areas to ensure that any outbreaks are detected and contained quickly. USG technical assistance to the FAO and LBVD has been successful, improving LBVD's capacity in the areas of disease detection, response and containment. LBVD officials are eager for additional U.S. technical assistance and support that they desperately need to prevent the outbreak or spread of the disease. We continue to have an excellent relationship with LBVD and remain impressed by LBVD's professionalism and willingness to share information. Our coordination with LBVD is one bright spot in an often difficult relationship with the GOB.

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